DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 281 PS 013 051

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TITLE Perception of Parent-Child Interaction in Three-Generational Black Family.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (90th, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982) and the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (New Orleans, LA, March 24-27, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; Comparative Analysis; Extended Family; *Family Involvement; Family Relationship; Females; Grandchildren; *Grandparents; Mothers; *Nuclear Family; *One Parent Family; Parent Role; Place of Residence; *Role Perception; Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS *Surrogate Parents

ABSTRACT

This study concerns the effect of family structure (single-headed or dual-headed nuclear families) and grandmaternal domicile (grandmother living with the nuclear family or in the local community) on the perception of grandmother/grandchild and parent/child interactions. The author's primary interest was to delineate the perceived role of the grandmother within the black family with regard to the rearing of children. Sixty families consisting of grandmothers, parents, and children were interviewed according to Bronfenbrenner's Parental Behavior Scale. Each adult family member was asked to describe his or her self-perceived interaction with the child as well as perceptions of the other relevant adult family members' interactions with the child. Children, ranging from 8 to 14 years of age, were also asked to describe their interactions with each relevant adult family member. Results indicate that grandmothers perceived (and were perceived as) having greater numbers of interactions with their grandchildren when they lived in the home as opposed to living in the community and when the family structure involved a single- rather than dual-parent structure. (MP)

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Perception of Parent-Child Interaction in Three-Generational Black Family[1,2]

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Presented as a part of a Poster-Session at the Annual Convention of American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August 1982.

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Perception of Parent-Child Interaction in Three-Generational Black Family[1,2]

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Abstract

This study was designed to analyze the perceptions of normal interactions between grandmother and grandchild and between parent and child. Sixty families consisting of grandmothers, parents and children between the ages of 8-14, were interviewed using Bronfenbrenner's Parental Behavior Scale (BPS; Devereux et al., 1969; Seigelman, 1963). Families who met the requirements of the factorial design consisting of two levels of family structure (single-headed or dual-headed nuclear families) and 2 levels of grandmaternal domicile (living with the nuclear family or living in local community) were recruited. The results provide normative information on the perceptions of interaction patterns within the context of three-generational black extended families.

Introduction

This study analyzed grandparent, parent and child perceptions of grandmaternal and parental behaviors. The primary interest was to delineate the perceived role of the grandmother in the black family and in the rearing of children. The question raised concerned the effect of family structure (single-headed or dual-headed nuclear family structures) and grandmaternal domicile (grandmother living with the nuclear family or in the local community) on the perception of grandmother-grandchild interactions and on the perception of parent-child interactions.

Incorporating the grandmother as a part of the black nuclear family is a significant distinction from past psychological studies on black family life (Baumrind, 1972; Biller, 1968; Boone, 1979; Busse & Busse, 1972; Cahill, 1958; Hartnagel, 1970; Hetherington, 1966; Hunt & Hunt, 1978). The goal of this research strategy is to analyze the perceived involvement of a possible surrogate parent in single-headed household families. By identifying possible resilencies and alternative patterns in black childrearing, a challenge is made to previous studies which have reported the pathological nature of single-headed family structures (Bernard, 1966; Frazier, 1947; Moynihan, 1965; Schultz, 1969).

The focus on the strength/resilence in research on the black family is not new. In fact, a consistent sociological and anthropological finding of the strength/resilent approach is the significant contribution of the extended family in the preservation of black family life (Martin and Martin, 1978; McAdoo, 1978; Stack, 1974; and Staples, 1978). The influence of the extended family within the black community is extremely important because of the large number of female-headed households which require childrearing assistance and economic support. Particularly for the single female-headed household, maternal uncles and other male relatives often serve as surrogate fathers in the rearing of young boys and girls (Martin and Martin, 1978 and Stack, 1974).

Moreover, the significance of the extended family is not limited to lower-class families. McAdoo (1978) has observed that extended family influence is felt by the middle-class black family as well. Her comprehensive study examined the effect of extended family on the nuclear family support systems. McAdoo found that her middle-class sample relied on extended family primarily for emotional support. Her study demonstrates that for the minority family of middle-class means the extended network of relatives is still a

significant factor in understanding minority people. Overall, the strength/resilence perspective protrays the extended family as representing considerable importance to the continual preservation of the black nuclear family.

Method

Design. In order to analyze the perceptions of normal interactional patterns between grandmother and grandchild and between parent and child, a factorial design consisting of two levels of family structure (single-headed or dual-headed nuclear families) and two levels of grandmaternal domicile (living with the nuclear family or living in the local community) was used.

Subjects. Sixty black families who met requirements of the design were recruited (15 familes per cell) from the local Charlottesville-Albemarle areas. The subjects who were maternal grandmothers, parents, and children between the ages of 8-14 years old, were enlisted using an informal network of local black leaders and other black community residents referring families to the principal investigator.

Dependent Measures. Basically, the interview strategy of this study extended the Bronfenbrenner Parental Behavior Scale (BPS; Devereux et al., 1969 and Seigelman, 1963), a structured self-report interview which measures four types of parental behaviors to the description of grandmaternal behaviors. The BPS requires respondents to answer numerous inquiries reqarding parental behaviors including: a) support (e.g., expressing affection and approval, explaining, helping and teaching), b) demand (e.g., expecting responsible and achievement oriented behaviors of children), c) control (e.g., exerting parental authority and protectiveness), and d) punishment (e.g., withdrawing approval, scolding and spanking).

Procedure. The interviews were conducted always by a male (the author) and a female (an undergraduate assistant) in the home of the participating family. The subjects were instructed on the general purpose of the study and on how to complete the structured self-report measure. The parents and grandmothers were always interviewed together and out of hearing range of the children by the male interviewer, while the children were interviewed by the female interviewer. The interviewers asked the subject to follow along as he/she reads each question and then indicate the response that best described, their interaction with other family members or their children. Since the BPS requires descriptive reaction to a particular child, whenever there were two or more children, the child who met the age criteria (i.e., 8-14) or who was the youngest within the age criteria was chosen as target child. Each adult family member described his/her interaction with the target child (i.e., self-perception) as well as their perception of the other relevant adult family members' interaction with the target child (i.e., other perception). The target child described his/her interaction with each relevant adult family member. The interviews were between an hour and a half to one hour in the length of time.

Results

The design of the study permitted analysis of the self- and other perception held by mothers and grandmothers as well as the perception of mothers and grandmothers held by children as a function of two conditions of family structure (single or dual heads of households) and two conditions of grandmaternal domicile (grandmothers living with the nuclear family or living in the community) along the four BPS-derived dependent measures (supporting, controlling, demanding, and punishing behaviors). The results of multivariate analysis of variance procedure (MANOVA) using Wilks' lambda criteria for

significance showed main effects of family structure on the other perception of mothers, $F(4,53) = 2.9$, $p < .039$, and main effects of grandmaternal domicile on the self-perception of grandmothers, $F(4,53) = 7.5$, $p < .0001$. Also, interaction effects occurred on the other perception of mothers, $F(4,53) = 4.3$, $p < .005$, and the other perception of grandmother, $F(4,53) = 3.0$, $p < .03$. The means of the groups by family structure and grandmaternal domicile are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The self-perception of mother and the children's perception of mother and grandmother were not significant.

Family Structure. The other perception of mothers showed significant univariate Fs for controlling, $p < .02$, and punishing, $p < .002$, behaviors. Examination of the table of means for the other perception of mothers demonstrates that the significant effects are accounted for by mothers of single-headed family structures (see Table 1) perceiving greater amount of interactions between grandmother-grandchild than the other conditions.

Insert Table 1 about here

Grandmaternal domicile. The self-perception of grandmothers showed significant univariate Fs for demanding, $p < .004$, controlling, $p < .0002$, and punishing, $p < .004$, behaviors. Examination of the table of means for self-perception of grandmothers indicates the effects are accounted for by grandmothers who live with the nuclear family perceiving a greater amount of interactions with grandchildren than grandmothers living in the community.

Insert Table 2 about here

Interaction effects. Univariate Fs indicated significant interaction for several of other perceptions of grandmothers and mothers. Specifically, the

other perception of mothers was significant for supporting, $p < .0005$, demanding, $p < .008$, controlling, $p < .001$, and punishing, $p < .04$, behaviors. Table 1 presents the table of means for the other perception of mothers. Post hoc comparison indicates that mothers who are single-heads of households and where the grandmother lives with the nuclear family home perceived greater interaction between grandmother and grandchild supporting, $F(3,56) = 4.76$, $p < .01$, controlling, $F(3,56) = 4.08$, $p < .01$, demanding, $F(3,55) = 6.68$, $p < .01$, and punishing, $F(3,56) = 7.0$, $p < .01$ behaviors than in other conditions.

The other perception of grandmothers was significant for support, $p < .03$, and punishment, $p < .02$ (see Table 3). Post hoc comparison demonstrated that grandmothers of single-headed nuclear families and living in the community perceived less interaction between mother and child using supporting, $F(3,56) = 2.76$, $p < .05$, and punishing, $F(3,56) = 3.46$, $p < .05$ behaviors than in other conditions.

Insert Table 3 about here

An interesting although not significant interaction that grandmothers of dual-headed family structure and living is community perceived or were perceived as involved with grandchildren to a greater extent than other conditions. This could be attributable to grandmother acting as sitters to dual-employed couples.

Repeated measures. Because of the repetative nature of the questionnaire administration procedures, it was important to determine the presence of any significant repeated measures effects. As such, data was analyzed using MANOVA procedures described by McCall and Appelbaum (1973). Basically, the computation involved examination of the additive and contrast effects of the

repetative test procedures by comparing self- and other perceptions of mothers and grandmothers and perception of grandmothers and mothers held by children. The results indicated that mothers', grandmothers' and childrens' self- and other responses were significantly different and thus the subjects made differentiated responses to stimuli.

Summarily, the results indicate that grandmothers perceived and are perceived as having greater amounts of interactions with their grandchildren when she lives in the home as opposed to living in the community and when the family structure involves single-parent rather than dual-parents. Specifically, the grandmothers who lived in household of a single-headed nuclear family structure perceived themselves and were perceived by their daughters as using an increased frequency of positive-supportive, controlling-demanding and punishing aspects of parental behaviors than the grandmothers in other conditions.

Discussion

The basic tenet of this study regarding the perceived role of the grandmother as a surrogate parent in the black nuclear family was supported. Specifically, it was demonstrated by a consistent convergence of self- and other perceptions held by mothers and grandmothers regarding grandmother-grandchild interactions across several dependent measures. That is, grandmothers who lived with the single-headed nuclear family saw themselves and were seen by their adult daughters as supporting, demanding, controlling and punishing grandchildren at a greater frequency than grandmothers in the other conditions. This finding is congruent with several sociological and anthropological studies which found more active involvement of grandmothers toward grandchildren of single parents than toward

grandchildren of dual parents (Ladner, 1972; Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1974).

Although this appears to be a rather mundane point, it is important to remember that past studies have talked about pathological conditions of single-headed family structures (Bernard, 1966; Moynihan, 1965; Frazier, 1947; Schultz, 1969). Clearly, earlier studies failed to consider extended family members as acting in an important childrearing capacity, within the single-headed family. Thus, this study is consistent with the efforts of other historical and social scientific revisions to represent an accurate protrayal of the black family (Genovese, 1974; Gutman, 1978; Ladner, 1972; Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1974; Stapes, 1978).

Interestingly, an opposite finding was discovered in the perception of grandmothers who lived in the community of single-headed nuclear family. In this case, the data suggested that grandmothers saw their adult daughters as providing less support and control toward their grandchildren than in the other condition. The implication of this finding indicates the existence of possible conflict between grandmother and her adult child in parental behaviors. Other family researchers have found similar indications of intergenerational conflicts or "generation gap" (Cohler & Grunebaum, 1981) over nurturent behaviors toward the child (Cohler & Gruenebaum, 1981; McGahey & Sporakowski, 1972; Wood, Glavin & Kettle, 1960; Staples & Smith, 1954). Antedotely, the consistent comment of grandmothers living in the community of single-headed nuclear families was that their adult daughters were "too lenient", or "was away from home too often."

There are several limitations to this study. First, there was an obvious social desirability effect present in the test questionnaire. Because the respondent were asked to evaluate their own behaviors as well as someone's

else it is possible that a systematic bias occurred which allowed the respondent to present self in favorable light. For this reason, it is not surprising that there was no main effect for the self-perception of mother. The self perception responses of grandmothers were probably not as heavily influenced by social desirability for several reasons. First, grandmothers are not governed by the same expectational level of performance as mothers since whatever the grandmother does is seen as extra and not essential. Second, grandmothers to some extent have already succeed in childrearing with their own children who have reach adulthood which is a basic criteria of successful parenthood. Finally, the world view of grandmothers is probably more realistically anchored in parental achievement such that they expect not to be perfect.

Second, the responses of the children may have been influenced by the demand of situation. Asking children to rate their parents and grandmothers in the home may have presented a rational conflict. Even though, the parents were not privy to the children's responses, the children may have felt oblige to respond in an acquaintance set. However, when comparing childrens' perceptions of mothers to grandmothers in a repeated measure MANOVA procedure, they did differentiate mothers from grandmothers. Nevertheless a more neutral testing situation may have resulted in a different outcome.

Finally, the nature of the task may have been too general given the specific functional relationship being described. The subjects were ask to describe highly situational specific behaviors using scales anchored general occurrences and/or general frequencies nature. As such, the reliability of the test response is lessened. Although an observational or specific behavioral task study would have resulted in increased reliability, the current study serves as an excellent preliminary investigation into the

psychological dynamics of the black extended family. Moreover, because there was convergence of perception across several dependent measures, the ecological validity of the responses is not lost.

Given the above limitation, the implication of this study suggest that psychological research and intervention on the black family should incorporate extended family members beyond the nuclear structure and particularly the grandmother. As others have long suggested, an accurate protroyal of the black family life must include the interdependent network of family loyalties and influences which goes beyond the concept of mother-father-children relationship (Boszornrenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Cohler & Gruenebaum, 1981; Martin & Martin, 1978; Speck & Rueveni, 1969; Stack, 1974; Staple, 1978).

Footnotes

[1]Portions of this study was supported by a small grant from the Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies.

[2]Presented at Annual Convention of the Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans and at a poster-presentation of the 90th Annual Convention of American Psychological Association.

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Structure of Nuclear Family		Support		Demand		Control		Punishment	
		Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Single	Dual
Grandmaternal Domicile	Living with the nuclear family	54.9	46.2	17.7	14.3	16.5	12.2	25.9	18.9
	Living in the local community	43.1	48.9	14.3	15.1	12.7	13.5	18.5	16.5

Table 1

Means number of responses for other perception of mother on support, demand, control and punishment

Structure of Nuclear Family		Demand		Control		Punishment	
		Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Single	Dual
Grandmaternal Domicile	Living with the nuclear family	17.4	16.4	15.2	15.5	25.1	20.6
	Living in the local community	15.4	14.4	12.9	12.4	16.9	18.1

Table 2

Mean number of responses for self-perception of Grandmother on demand, control, and punishment

Structure of Nuclear Family		Support		Punishment	
		Single	Dual	Single	Dual
Grandmaternal Domicile	Living with the nuclear family	55.1	53.9	28.9	23.9
	Living in local community	50.6	54.9	19.2	24.5

Table 3

Mean number of responses for other perception of grandmother on support and punishment